

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT PUBLIC HOUSING POLICY

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Rezumat:

Domeniul construcțiilor de locuințe din România se confruntă în perioada de tranziție spre un adevărat sistem democratic cu aspecte deosebite. Este vorba, în primul rând, despre drepturile omului: acela de proprietar al unei locuințe, care să corespundă exigențelor de siguranță și confort, dar și acela de producător de locuințe, motivat de obținerea profitului.

Astfel, în vederea concilierii acestor condiții și interese atât de diferite, cât și pentru folosirea rațională a resurselor și a bunurilor sociale, este necesară existența unei politici a locuirii pe termen mediu și lung, care trebuie înțeleasă atât de administrația centrală și locală, cât și de societatea civilă.

Cuvinte Cheie: locuire, locuință, strategie, reglementare, autorități publice, reabilitare

Abstract:

The field of house construction in Romania is confronting in the transition period through a real democratic system with remarkable aspects. It's about, first of all, the human rights: that the owner of a home, which correspond to the requirements of safety and comfort, but that housing constructor, motivated by achieving profits. Thus, for the conciliation of these conditions and interests so different, and to use rational resources and social goods, it's necessary to have a medium and long-term policy of housing, which has to be understood by both central and local administration, and of civil society.

Keywords: housing, dwelling, strategy, settlement, public authorities, rehabilitation

JEL Classification: O29

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction of housing field is a field that can contribute significantly to the economic growth and creating new jobs in metallurgy, machine building industry, construction materials, light industry and trade, transportation, communications etc.. Construction activity creates the life environment and constitutes an essential component of human existence. At the same time marks the culture and civilization and provides continuity between generations.

The construction of housing field in Romania confrunts with remarkable aspects in a transition period towards a truly democratic system. It's about, first of all, human rights: that the owner of a home, which correspond to the requirements of safety and comfort, but that housing producer, motivated by achieving profits.

For the conciliation of these conditions and different interests, and for the rational use of resources and social goods, it is necessary to have a long-term housing policy, to be understood by both central and local administration, and civil society.

Taking into consideration the importance of the access to adequate housing for every individual, the safety of the shelter being one of the basic needs of the human being and one of its fundamental rights which conditions its performance in the society, is absolutely necessary the involvement of local and central administration in the housing field.

Also, the experience of all the industrialized countries shows that the proper access to the housing for all the population can not be achieved without the intervention on public administration on the housing market - as a regulator, or a player with special status in the market - and especially without the development and implement of a certain elements of public policy in the housing field.

Housing policies cover all short and medium term housing programs and actions of central and local authorities, undertaken with the purpose of satisfaction of the population housing needs (Noica, 2003). They are conceive as part of economic policies, taking into account that the housing belong to the production field of any economy.

Housing policies are reflected in government programs that presents concrete objectives of the central or local governments, on short, medium and long terms, corresponding to the social needs according to the economic level and stability.

Housing plays a significant role in the development of any society, being a crucial element for economic, social and cultural progress. Also, housing may be directly or indirectly influence the competitiveness of

cities, being thus one of the factors that contributes to local economic development.

The current problems formulated in the countries with economies in transition, in this area, are linked especially by the motivation identifying to build a housing policy, by the choices to be made to establish the priorities and objectives of housing policy, by the way for the resources allocation, but also by the legitimacy and the intervention of public authority in the housing market.

A particular aspect of housing is the economic value of housing stock. The houses represent a stock of a huge capital in the city. Investments in housing - through purchase or rent - is a large part of private consumption (Weesep, 2000). Housing involves also adjacent substantial costs, which creates a significant economic multiplier effect: maintenance, taxes, utilities, finishing and many other expenses. Also, the investment in new housing construction represent important sums come from various sources. Housing tends to be, in the countries of the European Union, one of the major chapters of public budgets, because required significant public investment to create, maintain and provide services to a residential area.

The price of the houses is determined, in a market situation, by the quality of these and therefore the most richest tend to be concentrated in residential areas considered the best. It may be said that high quality housing attracts the kind of people with high incomes, which are generally decision makers and professionals highly valued, that is just those who make the local economy. When these groups of people are moving to an area, attracted by the quality of the houses, services and endowments the businesses follow them to capitalize the most important resource of them - human capital.

These arguments plead for the use of housing policies like a stimulating instrument for economic development of the city. At the same time, however, housing policies should create a system of social support for the disadvantaged groups because, while some individuals benefit and develop in the context of economic growth, others are marginalized or excluded, without benefit of the city welfare. The including of the objective to ensuring the access for all citizens to the priority list of municipalities for accessible price houses will promote social cohesion at the local community.

2. HOUSING RIGHT

The housing right has emerged on the political agenda since the nineteenth century, at response to housing problems arising from the industrialization and urban boom, associated with the housing crisis, imbalances between supply and demand, speculation in the sale of lands, exacerbated inequalities in access to housing between different social groups and between different areas, exorbitant costs,

problems come from the maintaining of an adequate stock of housing, poor conditions of housing and homeless persons (Lafore, 1993).

In the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) adopted by the ONU, it is shown that the basic human needs must be recognized as rights, promoting the concept of human dignity as a legal principle: *"Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for health and welfare to himself and his family, including the provide of food, clothes, house, medical care and necessary social services, as well as security right in case of unemployment, illness, physical incapacity to work, old age or other deficiencies relating to livelihood in circumstances that beyond the personal control"* (Article 21.1)..

The housing right is part of human rights legislation and is stipulated in 6 international treaties ratified by Romania too (Dan, 2003).

In romanian legislation the housing right is provided in the Housing Law 114/1996, and in the Law on preventing and combating social exclusion 116/2002.

The housing right is not refer just to the physical occupation of a built structure generically called "home", but include the following elements:

- Security of property, in which all people must have a degree of security of employment that guarantees the legal protection against the forced discharge, harassment and other threats;
- Access to public utilities of the houses, which means the necessity to be equip with certain essential facilities for health, safety and physical and psychological comfort and for cooking;
- The house must be habitability, must protect all those which occupy it and must provide an adequate space;
- Affordability requires that the costs associated with the housing should be calculated so as not to be threatened the obtain and the satisfaction of other basic goods (services/utilities);
- Location must be chosen, if possible, near the work place, the medical and social services, education, care and supervision of child and other economic and social facilities both in urban and rural areas;
- Cultural adequacy require that the house reflect the cultural environment of the person which occupies and to enable the expression of cultural identity.

3. NECESSARY ELEMENTS IN DETERMINATION OF HOUSING POLICY

For emphasize the proportion of the housing problem, is necessary a correct and responsible analysis of the housing state, and the recognition the housing problem like a social problem.

State housing analysis, suppose the crossing of some criteria:

Dwelling criteria, where are analyzed the qualitative characteristics of residential buildings:

- functional-architectural qualities of the dwellings (useful surface, built surface, height, orientation etc.);
- technical-constructive qualities (thermal and acoustic protection etc.);
- technological qualities (building materials, execution technologies etc.);
- economic qualities (estimation cost, maintenance and current repair cost, consumption of materials, labor, energy etc..);

Housing mode criteria, which takes into account the follow issues: number of persons per room, number of rooms per apartment, the number of dwellings per building, living space per person etc.;

Technical equipping of settlements criteria, which includes water alimentation, public sewage network, electricity network, telephone network, accessibility to transport networks etc..

After the state housing analysis and housing necessary evaluation, it is necessary to be formulated the housing policy.

Housing policy, like any public policy, is oriented towards the certain final objectives established in general, into statements and government acts.

The main qualitative objectives are refered to the quality of the dwellings (areas and functional organization), to the urban qualities (the location in territory and local) and to the economic qualities (financial impact);

The main quantitative objectives, are refered to the average number of dwellings built per year and the built surface area, price, purchasing power.

The instruments and means for realization of housing policy, are refered to:

- the normative and regulatory framework;

The normative framework includes laws adopted by the Parliament, decrees and decisions of government.

The regulatory framework is referred to the:

- property of buildings and dwellings , the rental of housing, management and maintenance;
- nature of property of the construction land, the concession and the expropriation system;
- principles of human settlement development, taking into account the demographic, social and economical evolution;
- minimum requirements of dwellings in terms of safety and comfort;
- stimulate investment system in the dwellings construction, through the provide of fiscal facilitates and subsidies, credit system and insurance system.
- *the institutional framework*, which includes all the organizations that are involved in the national housing system;
- *the means of achievement*: technical, material and financial.

The implementation of housing policy, is done in the context of a long term coherent system on different levels and in all areas involved: legal, financial, urban, social, of the local administration, of the building materials industry and environmental protection (Noica , 2003).

4. QUALITY OF HOUSING

Quality of housing is given by the access to public utilities. However, housing quality is not just access to the utilities and a roof over the head. Contemporary standards of comfort speak about the quality of the access to the utilities and are referred to the provide utilities quality.

In general Romania is worse than the european countries in terms of housing quality. The access to drinking water, current warm water, sewerage, the offices presence etc, register lower levels than the average european standards, but also against the expectations of the population.

The access to hot water and heat, cold current water, to electricity, natural gas, sewerage, sanitation services, proximity to purveyors of educational services, medical, commercial and social etc, tend to form a whole which provide quality to the housing through the access to public utilities. These indicators are strongly correlated among themselves. The overwhelming majority of urban residents who have

access to one of public utilities (except electricity, which is missing from the few urban households) have access to the other.

Access to drinking water

Access to cold water (drinking water) is a basic human need. The quality housing is seriously affected by the absence of water. In Romania, according to the 2002 Census, 72% of dwellings have water inside the dwelling. For urban areas the figure rises to 94%, most of them being connected to public sewerage networks (in the 6% of cases where water current is not present in the household, the access to a source of drinking water is generally done). The reasons of unconnected to public distribution systems tend to be generally, in cities, of a technical nature, the potential solutions being extremely expensive, difficult to be supported by a rather poor society, such as Romanian.

The differences between localities are depending on the size of the city. Larger cities tend to have more dwellings with access to cold water. In addition, the smaller is the settlement the bigger is the percentage of those who provide their own access to water, through their facilities without using public alimentation system.

Urban-rural disparities are also important, but more striking are those from the regions of country. Transylvania, as well as the areas on the periphery of large cities, heavily industrialized areas (such as the Prahova Valley) provide access to water and sewerage superior to the rest of the country. Moldova and Muntenia are instead the most disadvantaged zones. Differences are also determined by the water accessibility depending on the geographical differences, and different levels of development between the country areas.

Hot water and heating

Hot water and heating provide an essential indication on the comfort degree of a dwelling. Modern standard doesn't accept more unheating dwellings or without current warm water. This is the situation for the majority dwellings of the big urban, but the percentage of current warm water dwellings decreases dramatically in the small urban.

The differences between localities are depending on the size of the city. Larger cities tend to have more dwellings heated by the central system or by a termal central.

On a regional level, except Bucharest which is better equipped in terms of heating, Moldova is the province with most heated dwellings by electric central or electric proper central. The differences

between the Old Kingdom on the one hand, and Transylvania and Banat on the other side, are depending on the specific history and the history of urban planning.

Precarious housing in the hot water and heating is defined by their absence. It is generally associated with lack of incomes, with the overcrowding of dwellings, with housing in peripheral districts at house or in areas of buildings, particularly in the partially disabled or subpopulate.

It may be said that Romania's cities, on the whole, continuous access to hot water and heat is still a desideratum, a significant part of population being placed, from this point of view, under the modern standards. Also, large and medium cities shows generally a better situation than the small cities. The situation tends to be common for individual dwelling or in small ensembles (villas, houses) and apartments of blocks. Individual houses were and are still less included in common or centralized heating systems. They tend to haven't access to this utility. The block apartments have access to hot water and heat, mostly in the centralized system. Disconnections were affected largely the richest households, who have allowed the replacement of the centralized systems with apartment central. Major problem is related to those apartments, which after the disconnection, have had no sources of heating and hot water. These households tend to be concentrated mainly in small towns, where centralized systems are in collapse.

Electricity alimentation

The housing situation in Romania, from the point of view of electricity alimentation, doesn't put special problems. The Census of 2002 indicates that 97% of dwellings in Romania are connected to the electricity network. The same datas indicate that in urban areas 99% of dwellings are connected to the electricity network, while in rural areas the percentage is 95%.

There are some regional differences in the access of the population to public electricity. The region where the connection to the network is lowest (95%) is Moldova

It may be said that the overwhelming majority of the dwellings in Romania has access to electricity. Urban coverage is 99%, without problems regardig the access to the electricity network. The problems of distribution and access to electricity belong to non-payment of invoices to electricity purveyors, and on the other hand which generaly occurs in the case of disconnected. The disconnected persons steal electricity power from the network the most probably due to the increased prices of a new plug. This persons are exposed to a many risks especial of legal type.

Natural gas

The access of the dwelling to natural gas confer much comfort to the housing while is reducing the risk of fire. On the other hand, natural gas is a fuel used not only for cooking, but also to heat the home. Even the heating of the home is provided to be realised otherwise, some households choose the natural gas for the heating because it is cheaper compared to central heating.

However, the access to the natural gas network is not available to all households of Romania. The disparities between urban areas and rural areas are major in regard of the acces to the natural gas: while only 9% of rural households have access to the network of natural gas, 75% of urban households benefit by this advantage. It may be said that urban areas enjoy with a good cover regarding the access to the natural gas.

In a regional plan, the disparities of access to the natural gas network are major. Thus, Dobrogea has the worst cover, only 1% of households having access to the natural gas network, while Transylvania and Bucharest and the limitrophe zone benefit by a network which cover over 60% of households. However, the access of urban households, though it is differentiated by region is broader. Dobrogea keep the last place with a cover of only 1% of households, but in other regions more than half of urban households have access to the natural gas network.

The sewerage

The access to the sewerage is achieved mainly through the public network. In Romania there are significant differences in terms of access to the sewerage between urban and rural environment. Thus, while in urban environment 68% of dwellings are connected to the public system sewerage, in rural environment only 3% of dwellings have access to the public system. Instead, in the rural environment a higher percentage - 11% of households have their own sewerage system.

There are significant regional disparities in access to sewerage. Areas with the lowest coverage, both in their own system and in the public network are Moldova, Muntenia and Oltenia, while Dobrogea, Banat and Crişana have a much better coverage. Bucharest and borderland are an exception because 94% of households have access to the public sewerage.

The Population and Housing Census of 2002 shows that the access to sewerage is diferent depending on the size of the city. Thus, in larger urban areas, with over 200000 inhabitants, and in the medium-sized urban areas (between 100000 and 200000 inhabitants) over 90% of dwellings have access to the public sewerage. It can say that the access to public sewerage system decreases with the size of the

city. In small towns, with less than 30000 inhabitants only 54% of the dwellings are connected to the public sewerage system, while the number of households which have their own sewerage system is higher, round 13%.

Beyond the lack of access to public sewerage system or the lack of a proper sewerage system, which reduce the quality of housing, the sewerage pose more problems. Some of these problems are technical: the underchoosing of the network compared with the present needs of the city, the ancintury of pipes that lead to the appear of flaws or to frequent sticks, the absence of adequate treatment plant corresponding with valid standards. All of this leads to dysfunctions of the sewerage network which are reflected in the services offered to the public.

5. HOUSING POLICY AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

In Central and Eastern Europe, therewith dramatic political changes occurring in the last 20 years, housing policies have been completely reconsidered on the basis of new principles. To support this process, the Economic Commission for Europe of United Nations has laboured a guide (UNECE, 1993) which concentrates the experience existent in 1993 in the field of housing policy, retaining especially the relevant aspects for countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The experience has shown that the adequate satisfaction of housing required for all European countries, involved the existence of elements in public policy of housing and some interventions on the market of houses.

After the second World War the intervention of european countries in the housing field was major, the public administration undertaking the resolve of a profound crisis through the dwelling construction on a large scale, through measures to control the rents increased in acute lack of houses, and in some countries through rationalization of the living space per person. The quantitative satisfaction of housing demand, in the first phase, has followed by a rising of a number of vacant homes, especialy in a large ensembles built after the war.

This fact, has led to a reorientation of the public administration's objectives in the housing field, interest being focusing more now on the rehabilitation and maintenance of existing dwellings, on the change of structure of housing fund for individual dwellings built per lot. It can speak on qualitative phase of postwar policies on housing, and the lesson of the years of massive housing construction shows that the delivering of dwellings must be realized that correspond with the requirements of customers and to comply better the wishes of future generations too.

In Western European countries, starting of the middle of '70's, it became inadmissible the idea to leave an area to be degraded to a point where there is another solution than demolition. Public authorities in most countries have implemented regulations in renovation, often linked to the direct intervention of public sector in the development of an area. Starting of the middle of '70's, the policy has comprise almost without exception, in the conservation and renovation of the dwellings when these were cheaper than new building.

In Eastern European countries, the housing general situation in the moment of change the communist regime could be regarded as being particularly difficult - very low rules of habitable surface, old rules regarding construction quality, large number of families without home, large number of people living crowded into small apartments. All of this show that the housing sector is still confront with serious problems, gravity which must be reported to the other sectors of society and living standards in general.

Currently, in the most european countries, the local municipalities are responsible for ensuring access to social housing, but is using different suppliers: the municipalities (in Sweden and the UK), social organizations with special status (in Netherlands, UK, France) or private investors (Germany). For helping them, come generally the financial support of the state, expressed in various forms: reduction of taxes, subsidies for the operation of social housing, general subsidies for the social housing, loans, guarantees, social help for the dwelling accorded directly to the people.

A part of the housing policy objectives are achieved through the direct action of the public administration, but others require the existence of a functioning housing market. If the public administration must often intervene directly in the difficult social point of view cases, for most people the solution is found on the housing market. It's action depends on a number of factors, and the evolution of some of these can be influenced by the public administration. These factors, according to the guide UNECE (1993) are:

Regulation of ownership over lands and buildings and transactions that allow efficient exchanges of land and houses;

- A financial/capital market where there is trust between the investor and the consumer;
- A contractual basis for relations between different parties;
- A viable construction industry;
- An adequate supply of construction materials and tools;
- An adequate distribution of information on all aspects of the housing;

- Rules which control the physical condition of buildings and the health and safety conditions;
- Sufficient land on the market which provides access to cheap land for housing;

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